



## Policy and Resources Committee

08 June 2022

**Title** **Customer Experience and Digital Strategy Update**

**Report of** Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee

**Wards** All

**Status** Public

**Urgent** No

**Key** Yes

**Enclosures** Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment  
Appendix B – Customer Experience and Digital Business Case

**Officer Contact Details** Deborah Hinde, Director (Commercial and Customer Services)  
[Deborah.hinde@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.hinde@barnet.gov.uk)

Barry May – Head of Customer and Digital  
[barry.may@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:barry.may@barnet.gov.uk)

### Summary

This report provides an update on the delivery of the Council's customer improvement programme. It provides an overview of what has been delivered to date and the next phase of improvements. The report also includes an update on the resident engagement approach which has helped shape the priorities and plan outlined in section 1.27 – 1.36.

This plan includes short term tactical and longer-term strategic changes to improve the overall experiences of our residents, businesses and communities when engaging and interacting with the Council.

The report also provides an outline digital strategy, in section 1.37, providing a more people focused approach to technology delivery to ensure a more digitally enabled Borough fit for the

future.

The improvements set out in this report will benefit the delivery of the Council's priorities. It will provide a better customer experience for residents and businesses, opportunity for savings and allow us to prioritise resources to those most in need.

Whilst the acceleration to online services has worked well for some, and we have seen increases in those who are digitally enabled, it has created barriers for others and compounded the gaps of those that can access services and those that cannot. This report provides an update on the Council's digital inclusion programme of work and outlines, in section 1.13 – 1.25, what support is in place for our residents and communities.

The improvements aim to benefit our residents, businesses and staff in the following ways:

- enable Barnet residents, businesses, and the Council to thrive in the digital era and ensure digital access for all
- reduce complexity and simplify the experience for our customers when engaging and interacting with the Council
- improve promptness of response and manage expectations, with regular updates and greater transparency
- make it easier to give us feedback and ensure our processes and systems are responsive to change as a result
- improve the way we use data in a secure manner, so people do not need to repeat information unnecessarily and where possible prevent them being passed around
- reduce unnecessary contact with the Council and enable a more proactive and personalised approach to customer service
- make it easier to interact with the Council online 24/7, whilst prioritising resources for those people that need to speak to someone in person

## **Officers Recommendations**

**That the committee:**

- 1. notes the actions being taken by officers to the improve customer experience and the achievements made to date**
- 2. approves implementation of the improvement plans outlined in section 1.36 and 1.41 of this report and supported by the business case in Appendix B.**
- 3. agrees the Customer Experience vision and strategic aims in section 1.11**
- 4. agrees the Digital vision and strategic aims in section 1.37**
- 5. notes the digital inclusion programme outlined in section 1.13 – 1.25 and the initiatives available to support our residents, businesses, and communities**
- 6. note the investment decision will be approved as part of the Business Planning report at Policy and Resources Committee on July 19<sup>th</sup> 2022**

## 1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The Policy and Resources committee agreed the final phase of the customer transformation programme in January 2020 and this report provides an update on those deliverables and benefits as a result.
- 1.2 One of the Council's priorities is to provide good quality customer service in all that we do, alongside an ambition to create an inclusive borough where nobody is left behind. These have been key considerations in developing the customer experience strategic aims and priorities and a focus on continually listening to our residents and acting on their feedback underpins the direction of travel set out set out in this report.
- 1.3 In the year prior to the pandemic over 2000 residents and over 150 staff were consulted in producing the priorities and plans outlined. Engagement will continue to inform the detail as we implement the improvements our residents told us we needed to make and embed a culture that listens frequently to customers and acts on feedback, to improve continuously. A set of [customer service standards](#) has been produced, as a result, to act as a framework to ensure improvements reflect what our residents told us mattered to them.
- 1.4 As a result of COVID-19, the last two years have seen an unprecedented national challenge which has had a profound impact on both the Council organisationally and the Barnet community. We have all had to adapt to new ways of working and providing services.
- 1.5 Although we have seen a shift in the way people contact and interact with the Council, demand on our customer services teams remains high. For context, our housing teams supported residents over 230,000 times on the phone in 21/22 and over 446,000 calls were taken in our main contact centre.
- 1.6 The pandemic has had an impact on the way people use digital technologies. Unprecedented growth in online service has been seen across sectors and our own data shows increasingly our residents continue to use digital ways to interact with the Council and other organisations. Our staff, residents and businesses have had to adapt and learn new skills. How we support them and utilise emerging technologies to improve people's lives are key pillars to our strategy and plan moving forward.
- 1.7 Continual investment in online improvements has enabled this now to be the preferred way people interact with the Council for most transactions. We have seen an increase in our overall web satisfaction (by c13%) and increased ratings in the resident perception survey in relation to our website. We have seen a reduction in the number of phone calls, which have decreased by c30% over the last three years, to our main contact centre. We have seen a corresponding c50% increase in online transactional forms submitted and a 39% increase in website usage over the same period.
- 1.8 A combination of decreasing call volumes and increased web usage has enabled us to ensure resources are targeted to those most in need and/or have more complex and sensitive issues. This has led to a new model for our customer service teams to allow resources to focus on these customers alongside seeing a reduction in wait times to get through to talk to someone on the phone.
- 1.9 Although we have seen progress and improvement made, we also recognise there is still work to do. There can still be a fragmented customer experience across multiple processes and systems, and we know our services are not as joined up as they could be. There is not always consistency in the experience our customers have when interacting with the Council and the resident perception survey shows there is more to do in this regard.

1.10 Outlined in section 1.26 below are the next steps of our improvement plan, which aim to deliver a step change in the quality of our customers' experiences when dealing the Council.

### **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE VISION AND STRATEGIC AIMS**

1.11 Our vision is to is to provide excellent quality customer service in all that we do.

Our key strategic aims to enable this vision and how we will deliver them are set out below.

<b>Strategic aims</b>	<b>How will we deliver</b>
Improve the customer experience for our residents and business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enable a unified customer experience across service channels and delivery</li> <li>• work with residents to co-design services and continually improve them so customers find it easy to do business with us</li> <li>• provide a more holistic view of our residents, in a secure manner, to provide a more proactive and personalised service</li> <li>• invest in online services that are easy to access, use and are available when needed</li> </ul>
Embed a culture of customer experience excellence across the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• value our staff and provide training so all staff understand how to deliver great customer service</li> <li>• continually listen to feedback from customers and learn from mistakes and improve our services</li> <li>• reflect what is important to our residents and embed customer standards across the organisation to provide consistent high levels of customer service</li> <li>• show empathy, recognising individual need in every interaction</li> </ul>
Ensuring no resident is left behind and our services are accessible and inclusive to all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure services are designed so they are accessible to all, and we understand individual needs and circumstances</li> <li>• create a model that facilitates advocacy to those that need it most</li> <li>• ensure digital inclusion and support is at the heart of customer experience and customer service delivery models</li> <li>• use our data in a secure manner to allow us to take a preventive and inclusive approach when providing a great customer experience</li> </ul>

### **UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENTS MADE**

1.12 A set of improvements were agreed at the Policy and Resources committee in January 2020, an update on these is provided below:

- improvements to telephony routes and scripts have been made to ensure residents have support when they need it. We have since seen a significant reduction in customer complaints and escalations, in this regard
- with residents and staff, we codesigned a new set of customer standards and training to provide consistency across the organisation and a framework to ensure changes made reflect what residents told us mattered to them
- we implemented changes to ensure accessibility of the Council's website, which has been externally assessed for compliance
- we made improvements to the website, increasing satisfaction and usage, it is now the primary way residents contact us or seek information in many circumstances
- staff in the Council tax and customer experience teams have taken a data led approach to addressing areas of customer frustrations, implementing a series of improvements. These have led to a 32% increase in online completion rates, lower wait times on the phones and fewer escalations
- the face-to-face customer service team in Colindale has been re-provisioned to focus on customer advocacy and digital inclusion. The team will have a base in Colindale with the option to offer targeted appointment-based support from libraries
- new staff customer service training modules and an internal engagement programme have been launched
- we moved our 'Re.' customer service hub into the main customer services team to improve resilience, processes, and overall quality of customer service. This has led to reduced wait times and the number of complaints and escalations reduce
- staff in Street Scene and the customer experience team have collaborated to improve systems, data and processes across the whole customer journey thus enabling a more proactive and unified experience for residents. Chasing up enquiries was a key frustration fed back by our residents, and these changes have alleviated this. As a result of the changes, we have seen a 36% reduction in unnecessary calls, 21% increase in online transactions and 18% reduction in missed bins reported. We will replicate this approach across other service areas

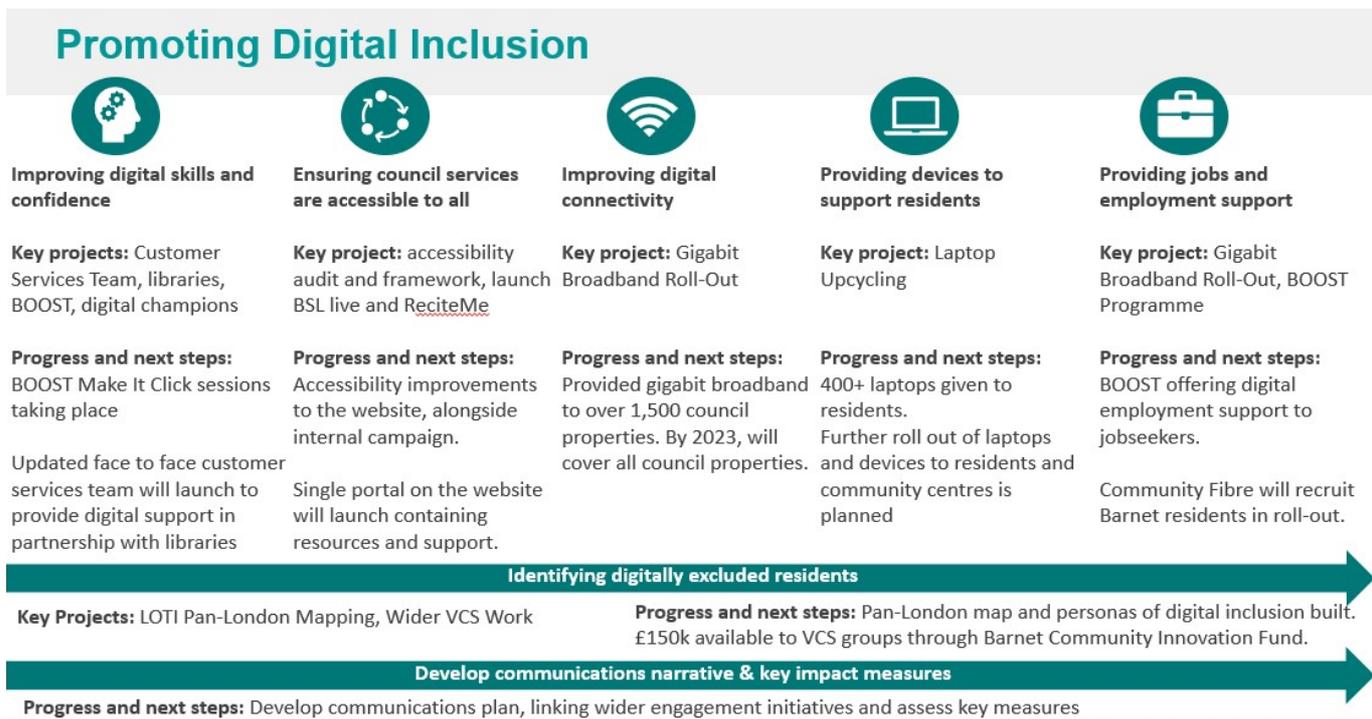
## **DIGITAL INCLUSION PROGRAMME**

- 1.13 The increase in online activity during the pandemic has worked well for many but for others it has compounded the gaps of those that can access services and those that cannot. This section of the report provides an update on the Council's digital inclusion programme of work and outlines what support is in place for our residents and communities.
- 1.14 Millions of people in the UK are digitally excluded - either through one or a combination of a lack of digital skills or confidence, access to digital technology, or access to the internet. This can have a hugely negative impact on a person's life chances, potentially leading to poorer health<sup>1</sup>, increased loneliness and isolation, and less access to education and jobs.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Building a Digital Nation - Good Things Foundation](#)

- 1.15 Digital inclusion is about ensuring the benefits of digital technology are available to everyone and this is at the heart of our approach. Digitally excluded groups can lack the skills, confidence, motivation or means to access the internet and by extension digital Council services.
- 1.16 A digital inclusion network has been established to bring together digital inclusion activity across different services, partners, health, and community groups to share best practice and raise awareness on the initiatives available.
- 1.17 Frontline services such as BOOST, Libraries, Barnet Homes, our customer service and adults' teams and others have been working to support residents, businesses, and our communities to receive the benefits of being online. A programme to train digital champions to support residents alongside a wide range of support is already being offered.
- 1.18 Working with our technology partners such as Microsoft, Capita, Community Fibre, and others, we are seeking additional support and funding for training and skills programmes, re-purposing laptops and increasing connectivity to the community.
- 1.19 The Council also works in partnership with pan London and national bodies, such as the London Office of Technology (LOTI), Local Government Association (LGA), West London Alliance (WLA) and Society of Innovation and technology (SOCITM) to ensure it makes best use of the shared resources available to improve digital inclusion for our residents and businesses. It is important to recognise a partnership led approach will be critical in improving digital access for all.



- 1.20 The above table illustrates a high-level view of our digital inclusion programme, with a summary on each project outlined below.
  - **Identifying digitally excluded residents to target interventions** through digital triage to make every contact count and provide an accurate picture of need.
  - **Improving digital skills and confidence** through digital champions within frontline services and community groups providing digital skills drop-in sessions and workshops close to home.

- **Ensuring council services are accessible to all** including ensuring residents have a clear view of support on offer, and that communications and information is accessible. But also providing business support to help high street and micro-businesses take advantage of digital tools.
- **Improving digital connectivity and affordability of connections** through free fibre connections for community centres, to create a network of localised digital inclusion hubs; alongside free fibre-for-a-year for unemployed and low-income households to help them get online at home.
- **Improving access to the equipment to get online** through free refurbished laptops for residents to help with access to study and work opportunities and to build their independence online.
- **Providing jobs and employment support through investment in digital infrastructure**, including jobs, apprenticeships, and work experience opportunities in the digital and telecoms sector.

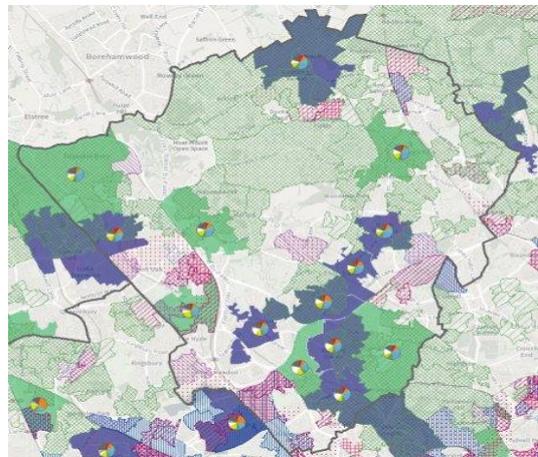
1.21 [Digital Barnet](#) has been launched on our website where residents, businesses and staff can access resources available in one place.

1.22 It should be noted that those who require digital support will differ and change depending on varying factors, thus making it difficult to pinpoint exactly who will need digital support in Barnet.

1.23 The Barnet insight and intelligence unit have led on a piece of work to deliver a map that uses publicly available data to identify areas that may have relatively high levels of digital exclusion based on those likely to be excluded<sup>2</sup>. The map shows community demographics and characteristics that have been identified through research as the key factors or proxy indicators to the propensity for digital exclusion. This insight will be critical in ensuring we target and prioritise the right interventions to the right people at the right time, moving forward. A summary is illustrated below.

This map shows areas in Barnet where people are likely to be digitally excluded because there are higher concentrations of:

- Older people (green)
- Low-income families (pink)
- Unemployment (blue)
- Disability (purple)
- Micro businesses (coloured circles)



1.24 The second phase of this work aims to establish a 'digital triage' pilot, in key resident facing teams, that will aim to provide pathways for residents interacting with the Council to get the right support in getting them online.

1.25 In addition to the benefits highlighted, supporting residents to get online is crucial in response to the cost-of-living crisis. National research<sup>3</sup> shows tangible benefits by doing this; time saved,

<sup>2</sup> [Exploring the UK's digital divide - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [the economic impact of digital inclusion in the uk final submission stc 0.pdf \(goodthingsfoundation.org\)](#)

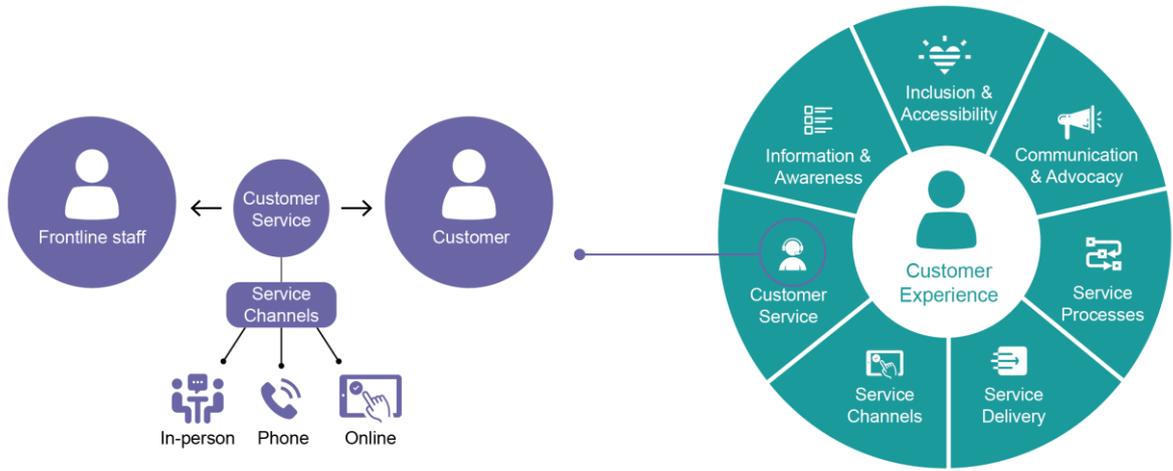
increase in earnings, better employability prospects and being able to save money by shopping online.

- 1.26 In summary it is considered this work programme continues to be a priority area of work and underpins all digital changes and enhancements we make, leveraging technology investment to support and benefit our residents, businesses, and local economy.

## **2022 IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND BEYOND**

- 1.27 Good progress has been made to date. We have seen significant reduction in calls with more customers choosing to use the improved online options. Our residents told us that they want our phone service for more complex or sensitive enquiries, and a shift in operating model, facilitated by the reduction of simple transactional enquiries, has started to support residents better in this regard. We have seen increases in satisfaction alongside this.
- 1.28 However, we still have a fragmented customer experience across multiple and often siloed processes and systems, and we know our services are not as joined up as they could be. There is not always consistency in the experience our customers have when interacting with the Council and the resident perception survey shows there is more to do in this regard. This continues to cause frustration, complaints, and unnecessary escalations for our residents.
- 1.29 We know that over 70% of customer interactions are made with 4 or 5 services and a focus on these service areas, looking at the whole end to end customer experience, is vital in improving the overall experience residents have with the Council. Improvements, outlined above, with our Street Scene and Council tax services have begun to show the benefits of this approach.
- 1.30 The previous [Customer Experience Survey](#), reported to [P&R committee in 2020](#), provides a great level of detail as to what is still causing customer frustration and alongside a continuous approach to reviewing feedback, data and insight, listening to our residents will and have inform our action plan and areas of improvement moving forward.
- 1.31 Often, simple changes, such as updating residents when we say we will, accepting when things go wrong, and ensuring ownership and resolution of the customer enquiry will be important. Alongside implementation of new technologies, processes, and a continuous improvement mind-set, we will see further increases in satisfaction and a reduction in complaints.
- 1.32 Barnet has a multitude of systems, there are 38 core systems currently in use that interact with our customers either directly or via staff capturing resident information. This creates a significant problem in terms of obtaining a more holistic view of our citizens, making it difficult for us to truly understand their needs, and take a preventative and proactive action on their behalf.
- 1.33 In section 1.36 there is an update on the Digital and technology work programme that provides more information on how technology will support delivery of the improvements required. To deliver the unified customer experience that our residents increasingly expect, we need to continue collaborative approaches to improving our services, as we implement technology and process changes that will have a positive impact.
- 1.34 The focus of the future improvement programme will see a shift from just looking at customer services in the contact centre or our website to considering the entire end-to-end experience our residents and businesses have when engaging and interacting with the Council. This will provide more meaningful interactions, reduce failure demand and unnecessary contact, and ensure excellent customer services in all that we do.

1.35 Improvements to the 'front door' will continue but there will continue to be a greater emphasis on improving the customer's experience of the whole organisation and all the touchpoints a person has with the Council, improving end to end processes and system interfaces. The diagram below illustrates this in some more detail.



**IMPROVEMENTS COMING IN 2022**

1.36 This section of the report updates on some improvements to be delivered in 2022.

What will be delivered	How will it benefit Barnet residents, businesses, and staff
A new contact centre solution improving our telephony offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve resilience and stability to provide better performance to our residents</li> <li>• provide an alternative to the unpopular push button phone menu system. This will simplify and reduce the time it takes to get through on the phone</li> <li>• during busier times residents will be given the option to receive a call back rather than having to wait in a queue</li> <li>• text alerts to get those people who wish to, straight to the right content on our website to self-serve 24/7</li> <li>• provide real time accessible insight and data to shape and re-design services to better meet our customer needs</li> <li>• over time will automate verification, becoming more personalised and predictive so residents do not need to repeat information and are triaged to the right team quicker</li> </ul>
Continue to improve our website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continue to review content for low volume areas of the site and respond to feedback to ensure our website is as accessible and useful as it can be</li> <li>• implement more flexible designs, which are more responsive to changes. We will create more business focused pages, commercial designs to better generate income, visual designs to engage different audiences, for example</li> <li>• improve online forms and our Myaccount, so it is more mobile friendly, providing an 'app like experience'</li> <li>• introduce automated self-service for high volume Highways transactions, replacing paper-based processes. This will also include online payments</li> </ul>
Implement tools to ensure our services are accessible to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• launch a British Sign Language (BSL) 'live' solution supporting our deaf and hard of hearing residents access services in a much more convenient way</li> <li>• launch ReciteMe, to improve our web experience for our visually impaired</li> </ul>

all	residents to access to our digital content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• launch intelligent chat functionality on our website to improve access to services</li> <li>• complete a further review/audit to ensure there are no gaps that exist to preventing all residents equal access to services</li> </ul>
-----	--

## DIGITAL VISION AND STRATEGIC AIMS

1.37 To enable the benefits and improvements outlined in this report and set the right conditions for future years in becoming a digitally enabled Council and borough, a set of refreshed digital and technology strategic aims have been outlined in this section of the report.

1.38 This will ensure a more people focused approach to technology and will support the organisation on its journey to becoming a more digitally inclusive Borough for all, ensuring that the benefits from technology are felt across all our communities, staff, and the borough.

Our Vision is to enable Barnet residents, businesses, communities, and the Council to thrive in the digital era and ensure digital access for all

Strategic aims	How will we deliver
Promote digital skills, capabilities, and inclusion to ensure no one is left behind and all thrive in a digital era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work with staff to co-design solutions and streamline service applications so they are accessible and reduce complexity and simplify their experience</li> <li>• ensure staff and the public feel confident using technology, investing in digital capabilities and skills, and providing access for all</li> <li>• ensure digital inclusion and support is at the heart of the digital strategy and we leverage our technology supply chains to support digitally excluded staff, residents, and businesses</li> <li>• ensure a digital workplace, improving the tools available to staff making working at, and with, Barnet Council easier, more efficient and collaborative</li> </ul>
Address the growing demand for digital services and co-design solutions with our residents and staff, to deliver outcomes that matter to them and provide interventions that improve peoples' lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-design and provide services and technology around the needs of the people using them</li> <li>• develop technologies in an agile manner ensuring the product meets the purpose intended and builds requirements and thus solutions collaboratively and iteratively</li> <li>• take advantage of shared digital components to enable transformative service design, and drive innovation</li> <li>• be data driven to ensure the right data and insight is used to find solutions to the right problems</li> </ul>
Our people, place and communities are connected through data and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build data layers that provide a more holistic view of services and interactions to our staff and for our customers</li> <li>• use data in an open manner across sectors to develop innovation and connections that would not traditionally be considered</li> <li>• embed sustainability into our approach to delivery and consider how digital can contribute to Barnet becoming a</li> </ul>

	more sustainable borough
To ensure a customer focused support function within IT that delivers security, flexibility, and reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continue to listen to staff and build continuous improvement plans that address barriers in providing excellent services to our residents and businesses</li> <li>• invest and prioritise security measures to mitigate the risk of cyber-attacks and security incidents, which could have a serious impact on service delivery</li> <li>• enable a hybrid model of work in a secure and reliable way, so staff can work anywhere and collaborate easily across the Council and with our partners and other external organisations</li> </ul>

- 1.39 How we shape and deliver a more connected digital strategy is important and will need a change in approach to how we implement technology. How we connect people and data both internally and externally requires a more joined up approach to implementing digital and data solutions into the organisation. The benefits of getting this right will enable us to continue to drive innovation and provide more preventative and personalised services to our residents, businesses and people that work and visit the borough.
- 1.40 Achieving a truly digitally connected borough accessible by all will need us to rethink how we engage the market and utilising a range of partners and delivery models will be important considerations as we look to have a more far-reaching digital strategy.
- 1.41 The below table provides a high-level summary of the technologies that will be delivered, and benefits enabled and associated to them.

<b>What will be delivered</b>	<b>How will it benefit Barnet residents, businesses, and staff</b>
Cross Council Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enabling a more proactive and personalised experience, making it simpler to do business with the Council and provide greater transparency and proactive updates</li> <li>• enable a single joined up Council for our staff, residents, and businesses to provide a more holistic customer experience</li> <li>• provide real time accessible insight to shape and re-design services around the needs of our customers</li> </ul>
'Data Lake' – Holistic view of Resident, Business and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• connecting our people, place, and the communities we serve through a more holistic approach to data and integrated technologies in a secure manner</li> <li>• developing predictive analytics and tools to support the Council's prevention agenda to target resources and support to those residents in greater need and at an earlier stage of intervention</li> <li>• build data layers that provide a more holistic view of services (a 'golden record') to inform insight driven service change, to develop innovation and connections that would not traditionally be considered</li> </ul>
Modernisation infrastructure (Networks, cloud migration, application)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a more cloud-based enterprise or holistic approach to technology improving security, resilience and scalability whilst lowering costs over the longer term</li> <li>• a reduction of IT systems staff uses, reducing complexity, support, and maintenance costs, and increasing accessibility for staff</li> </ul>

consolidation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing more modern technology that is responsive to agile design and development to meet the needs of those using the technology and their changing priorities</li> <li>• Reduced carbon emissions via our engagement of strategic partners with aligned sustainability objectives</li> <li>• ensure a digital workplace, improving the tools available to staff making working at, and with, Barnet Council easier, more efficient and collaborative</li> </ul>
Process automation (RPA) and service 'digitisation' and integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• utilise automation to cut out unnecessary waste and bureaucracy in processes to ensure our services are accessible, simple to use and respond to residents in a timely and proactive manner</li> <li>• increase transparency for residents and staff, providing clearer next steps and expectations</li> <li>• implement a technology framework that will remain valid well beyond the lifetime of the programme and ensure Barnet is fit for the future</li> <li>• implement an integration layer across systems making it simpler to share data and automate processes in a secure manner</li> </ul>

1.42 Connecting our staff, our communities, and our place through a more holistic approach to data and technology will set important foundations to allow the Council to adapt, innovate and integrate to emerging digital solutions well into the future.

1.43 Further detail is set out in the business case in appendix b, with associated financial costs and benefits explained. It should be noted that whilst we will implement the infrastructure in 2022/3, to realise the full benefits outlined will take time and build over the life of a multi-year program.

## **RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION APPROACH**

1.44 As outlined in the report resident engagement and insight has been crucial in informing our approach. The detailed customer experience survey in 2019, recent resident perception surveys and constantly reviewing feedback, complaints and our service data have been embedded into our approach.

1.45 How we utilise existing resident engagement forums and tap into the rich network of community groups in the Borough, to improve the customer experience, will be an important lever for change as we move forward. Our residents that we engage with have been great in providing honest and useful feedback and provide the knowledge to help us co-design the right solutions for them.

1.46 During the COVID19 pandemic, we unfortunately have not engaged with residents, in person in the way we would have liked, but now welcome the opportunity to do so again. We are currently working in several areas to hear directly from residents and businesses. We are working with our adults' teams to talk to those in care, and carers, who often act on behalf of someone else when contacting the Council and our economic development team to plan specific engagement tailored to the needs of our businesses in the Borough.

1.47 Alongside this we have started to be available in person in libraries to directly hear people's wider experiences with the Council and what barriers exist in accessing services. Another key group of people we will begin to work with will be those where English is not their first language, to understand their specific needs and potential barriers to accessing our services.

1.48 This approach will provide us with a richness of insight to inform and shape how we implement the improvements to technology and the processes outlined in this report and ensure they work for those who intend to use them.

- 1.49 Alongside this we will be launching a communication campaign to reach out to residents to regularly raise awareness of what improvements are available and ensure everyone benefits from them creating a continuous feedback loop.

## **INTERNAL STAFF CAMPAIGN**

- 1.50 The changes mentioned above will be supported by an internal campaign to ensure all staff understand their role in delivering excellent customer service. The customer service standards mentioned previously in the report will ensure our staff know what is expected of them and what our customers can expect from us. A set of frameworks and toolkits will be developed to empower staff to make the right decision dependent on the individual needs of the resident or business that they interact with.
- 1.51 A refreshed training hub has been launched for our staff alongside an internal collaboration hub, to share best practice, collaborate better and crucially share insight that can lead to improved customer experience. This will enable all staff to have access to consistent training and the right tools to assist our residents and communities' in providing excellent quality customer service in all that we do.

## **2. Reasons for recommendations**

- 2.1 Demand on public services continues to grow, and the public sector faces a period of unprecedented change, driven by global and national factors, policies and legislative changes that will have a profound impact on how Barnet delivers its services. Like many Councils, Barnet also faces the dual challenge of increased demand for services while at the same time having to reduce budgets and meet the rising expectations of our residents and communities on the services we deliver.
- 2.2 To meet these challenges, it will be important the Council is agile and responsive. The Council has started this journey evidenced by the recent investments in the customer transformation and digital workplace programme which enabled the Council's pandemic response. However, we also know we have more to do to unlock the true value that digital investment can bring. By investing in a digitally enabled Borough, we will enable and empower staff, our residents, and communities to adapt better and make sure we are fit for the future.
- 2.3 The Council and its staff are committed to always delivering an excellent customer experience, but we recognise that sometimes our fragmented systems and processes and the sheer complexity and amount of legacy IT systems do not enable us to do this. Our data is not easily shared, so often residents need to repeat themselves and it can appear Council services work in isolation. The recommendations and investment in the right technology, implemented in the right way aim to fix this.
- 2.4 The Council has over 160 different IT systems and applications in use. Whilst this is not uncommon for local authorities' representing the breadth and scale of service delivery, it also presents an opportunity to reduce costs by rationalising and consolidating these systems providing more integrated and Council wide solutions. Importantly as well as cost saving opportunities this will make our systems and processes more accessible and reduce complexity for our staff, residents and communities when engaging and interacting with the Council.
- 2.5 As already outlined the demand for digital services has increased exponentially in the last 24 months, and the recommendation and plans laid out in this paper will present further opportunity for automation and self-serve, ensuring resource and vital staff time can be prioritised to those needing extra support. Supporting our residents in the current cost of living crisis, who may be financially vulnerable is a good example of where this will add immediate and necessary benefit.

- 2.6 By investing smartly in growing our digital and data capabilities, we will be able to make better use of data to enable prevention and earlier intervention; keep people independent and healthier for longer; deliver the responsive and reliable services the people of Barnet expect; introduce new ways of working that are more efficient; support our communities and Barnet's businesses to thrive in a digital world.
- 2.7 As mentioned earlier in the report it is important the recommendations and priorities outlined recognise those residents and communities that have not been able to benefit from digital advancements and we continue to invest and work with our partners and supply chains to ensure all can benefit from being digitally included.

### **3. Alternative options considered and not recommended**

- 3.1 Committee could choose to not approve the programme of works – this is not recommended as benefits outlined in this report would not be delivered and the Council and our residents would get left behind in an ever-increasing digital world. Our technology would not be modernised and our ability to deliver excellent customer experiences would be limited. We would not provide the flexible, agile, and responsive services required to support residents to tackle the challenges ahead. Our cyber-attack defences would not be strengthened and there is a potential risk for this to have an increased impact on services. The opportunity to realise financial benefits and reduce future costs of IT provision would not be made.
- 3.2 A further option considered is to scale back the scope of the programme and continue to deliver individual projects in isolation. This is not recommended as one of the key frustrations felt by our residents is the Council does not join up services, is not proactive and does not understand our resident needs across services or at point of contacting the Council. The Council would not leverage the security benefits of providing enterprise-wide solutions, to join up systems, automate services and use data to provide a more proactive and preventative service offer to our resident. In the long term, it will store up greater costs and potentially see unintended consequences in other parts of the Council as changes are made in isolation.

### **4. Post decision implementation**

- 4.1 If the Committee approves the recommendations in this report, then the Council will start to implement the changes and will continue to ensure the improvements highlighted in this report are monitored and will track both the customer and financial benefits and report back to committee as necessary
- 4.2 We will continue to listen to our staff, residents, business, and wider communities to help us co-design the implementation of the changes and ensure we implement what matters to them.
- 4.3 We review each change to ensure our services are accessible to all and our services are inclusive.

### **5. Implications of decision**

#### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 The Customer experience and Digital strategy is an enabler to delivering across all the Councils priorities and will enable the delivery of the priorities and outcomes set out in the future.

## 5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

5.2.1 **Finance & Value for Money:** the issues of funding and implementation of any proposals noted within this report will be considered further in the business planning report presented at P&R committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July. A full business case is attached in the appendix B that considers the financial investment and benefits and has built a return-on-investment test as each of the programme deliverables are implemented.

5.2.2 **Procurement:** any procurement proposals identified within this report in support of strategy delivery will be subject to procurement in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Additional procurement requirements arising from the development of the strategy will be authorised in accordance with value and as appropriate under the delegated authority, subject to the approval of this report.

5.2.3 **Staffing:** key stakeholders have been considered as part of the creation of this report and will be engaged as part of the development and implementation of the programme and for each project impact assessment.

5.2.4 **IT:** all considerations have been laid out in the body of this report

5.2.5 **Property:** there is minimal impact to property due to the implementation of these recommendations

5.2.6 **Sustainability:** the digital strategic aims will embed sustainability into our approach to delivery and consider how digital can contribute to Barnet becoming a more sustainable borough. This will include ensuring our technology supply chain align with our sustainability objectives. The use of unified data layers will support delivery of the sustainability strategic framework. Overall, a reduction in paper based manual processes and increase in automation and online activity will support the Council to reach its net zero targets as will migration of application to the cloud.

## 5.3 Legal and Constitutional Reference

5.3.1 The Council's Constitution, Article 7 Committees, Forums, Working Groups and Partnerships, sets out the functions of the Policy and Resources Committee which includes Customer Services and Resident Engagement.

5.3.2 An element of the Customer Experience and Digital Strategy and Business Case is the better use and sharing of data. Implementation of the plans outlined in this report, will need to ensure each element complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. Further, where the processing of personal data using new technology is implemented, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be undertaken addressing those risks

## 5.4 Insight

5.4.1 All relevant insights are reflected in the main body of this report.

## 5.5 Social Value

5.5.1 The proposals outlined in this report seek to ensure that accessing the Council's services is a more efficient and effective experience, that services are more transparent and

accountable to the customer, that more information and services are available online so that customers can access them at a time of their choosing, and that barriers preventing customers accessing online channels are addressed through a Digital Inclusion programme.

- 5.5.2 As part of the implementation of the digital delivery programme, we will and have ensured our technology supply chain support and invest in our digital inclusion initiatives. We will continue to seek opportunities as new technology is implemented to meet the Councils overall social value objectives supporting our communities.

## 5.6 Risk Management

- 5.6.1 The Council has an established approach to risk management, which is set out in the Risk Management Framework. Managing risk will be an essential part of programme management and will be considered in the development and delivery. Further risks are outlined in the business case found in appendix B.

## 5.7 Equalities and Diversity

- 5.7.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in appendix A.

## 5.8 Corporate Parenting

- 5.8.1 In line with Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in decision-making across the Council. The outcomes and priorities in the refreshed Corporate Plan, Barnet 2024, reflect the Council's commitment to the Corporate Parenting duty to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and the needs of children are considered in everything that the Council does. To this end, great attention has been paid to the needs of children in care and care leavers when approaching business planning, to ensure decisions are made through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do for their own child.
- 5.8.2 The approach outlined in this report will help the Council identify key needs of our residents and where things are not working for them and respond appropriately to continue to ensure the best outcomes for Barnet residents, including Children and Young People that are in the care of the local authority.

## 6. Background papers

- 6.1 [Policy & Resources Committee paper 6th January 2020](#)